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ABSTRACT

The use of rhymes in a reading program can result in improved listening skills, increased vocabulary, improved spelling, and greater proficiency in comprehension. A rhyme can be improvised and/or adapted for every skill in the reading hierarchy. In order to make knowledge about rhyming words useful for improving reading skills, the teacher must relate the oral activity of rhyming to the visual activity of focusing the students' attention on the part of the word that is the rhyming part--the phonogram. In the matter of the mechanics of reading, the discovery of the rhyming lines through thinking that is self-initiated or stimulated by the teacher makes it easier for children to identify words that rhyme but do not look alike--do and blue, for example. Rhymes also provide a sense of order and harmony of sound. In addition to contributing to children's learning to read and write, rhymes offer some "fringe benefits" actually related to learning. For example, the collection of rhymes found in a book by W. Coley entitled "I'm Mad at You" can help children deal with varying degrees of anger. Children's deep-seated interest in rhymes challenges teachers to use rhymes as a part of their total reading program. (HOD)

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Susan Partridge

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Rhymes: An Untapped Resource for Teaching Children to Read and Write

The continuing interest of some educators in the use of rhymes to teach children to read and write; reports of success by those who have used them successfully; an examination of reading texts in which rhymes were conspicuous by their absence; and many classroom observations in which the use of rhymes was not in evidence prompted the writing of this paper which addresses itself to the question, "Are rhymes an untapped resource for teaching children to read and write?" A discussion of the many advantages of using rhymes in this regard is followed by the presentation of several rhymes, most of which are improvised, with suggestions for teaching some of the skills necessary for understanding and enjoying them. These skills include the "mechanics" of reading as well as the higher-level skills, such as reasoning, possessed by the intelligent reader. It was concluded that rhymes are a neglected resource and that their inclusion as one part of a total comprehensive reading program would result in children's greater pleasure and proficiency in reading.

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Rhymes: An Untapped Resource for Teaching Children to Read and Write?

Children are fond of rhymes as evidenced by their repeated chanting of rhymes heard on T.V. as well as those derived from other sources. In spite of all this, a review of various reading texts reveals that rhymes with a strong appeal to today's children are not found in abundance, if found at all. However, visits to public libraries have resulted in the location of entire books of rhymes on things to which many of today's children can relate: nonsense, zany characters, balloons, lambs, jam, tents, windshield wipers, puddles, leaves, the apple, the tree, the frog, and many, many more. In addition, rhymes dealing with emotions, with feelings, with behavior, with social growth, and those used in physical activities can also be found.

Many of these books have recent copyright dates and are published by reputable publishing companies. This seems to indicate that their contents do have a genuine appeal to many of the children in today's pluralistic society. Unfortunately, many librarians have said that the better readers are the ones who frequent the libraries. Hopefully, some of the poorer readers might follow suit if the use of rhymes as one part of a total comprehensive reading program should result in their receiving more pleasure and profit from their reading.

In addition to the ready availability of rhymes in public libraries, in book stores, on the many greeting cards found in

card and gift shops, rhymes can be improvised and adapted by teachers, and, of course some children enjoy writing rhymes. With this abundance of material, no one rhyme has to be "dissected to death" in teaching a particular skill.

Rhymes can be read, chanted, or sung, and they can be adapted with specific goals in mind. Melanie Boland who took advantage of these assets in programming for the primary-age handicapped children she was teaching, found that her program resulted in improved listening skills, increased vocabulary, improved spelling and also that it encouraged comprehension on the part of the children. Ms. Boland included motor activities in her program; this provided additional pleasure and profit for the children.

It is believed that there is, or can be, (improvised and/or adapted) a rhyme for every skill in the reading hierarchy. Many teachers know children who have great directional confusion; they are seemingly unaware of the bilaterality of man. It is extremely difficult for them to distinguish left from right, and some have been observed doing one-sided skipping. A very interesting rhyme, written by Mary Ann Hobermaan, which might help some of these little children, follows:

Windshield wipers wipe the windshield
Wipe the water from the pane

This way That way
This way That way
This way That way
in the rain

The illustration accompanying the rhyme would appeal to many children, as a dog with long ears and big eyes is the driver of

the car with its windshield wipers working.

An improvised rhyme which might also help in understanding bilaterality follows:

Skipping

Skipping along with the breeze,
Skipping along 'neath the trees,

My hair blows back,
My face feels cool.
Where am I skipping?
I'm skipping to school!

S.P.

A few improvised rhymes and suggestions for developing some reading skills (depending upon the child concerned follow:

Rain

Rain! Rain! How I love the rain!
It pitters and it patters,
But that's not what really matters:
Rain gives life to all below --
Man, plants, animals, birds, and, so,
The rain is good. Bless the rain!

S.P.

Children can relate to rain, and at times it has disappointed them as evidenced by "Rain, rain, go away. Come again some other day." The rhyme offered above emphasizes the good that rain does.

To help with the mechanics of reading and with thinking, the children might be asked this question, "What forms of life are there on earth that must have rain?" Answers such as plants, man, and animals can, conceivably, then be recognized in print by those who possess only a limited phonic knowledge.

Repetition of words, and the use of words that look and sound somewhat alike -- patters, matters, etc., but, for the sake of meaning, must be distinguished by one different graphic representation (p-m), provide further help with comprehension, and "mechanics" as well.

Some children can chant a number of rhymes but do not transfer this ability to decode written words; others, seemingly, make a transfer from the oral to the written "on their own" and thus improve their reading skill. Murlee Hart has advised: "In order to make the knowledge about rhyming words useful for improving reading skills, the teacher must relate the oral activity of rhyming to the visual activity of focusing the students' attention on that part of the word that is the rhyming part -- in other words, the phonogram."

Making use of phonograms (abundantly provided in rhymes) to decode written words is much more expedient than using the phoneme-grapheme correspondence, and, consequently, a help in comprehension.

In this next rhyme, "A Career", the words in the series are not in regular order as they are in many other rhymes. However, the thinking child knows that in counting down, ninth comes after tenth, but, obviously, ninth doesn't begin with an s. He/she

realizes that floors (numbers) are skipped. A discussion of why this is so can provoke thought.

A Career

When I grow up,
I'm sure that I'll be
A smart elevator man,
Just listen to me:

"Up! Going up!
Step back, please!
Watch the gate!
Let them off, please!

Down! Going down!
Fifteenth! Eleventh!
Down! Going down!
Tenth! Seventh!"

Yes, when I grow up,
I know that I'll be
A smart elevator man,
Just wait and you'll see!

S.P.

Figurative language must be understood if children are to fully understand their reading. In the rhyme, "The Huffin' Puffin' Muffin", opportunity is provided to help the children discover the meaning of "turn his head" as offered in the rhyme.

The Huffin' Puffin' Muffin

A huffin' puffin' muffin
Jumped out of the oven and said,
"The heat of that big oven
Would turn a muffin's head."

And turn his head it did,
For into the pond he jumped.
The huffin' puffin' muffin
Was most thoroughly dunked.

S.P.

For some children, help with the words huffin' and puffin' might well be in order.

In this next rhyme, "Smoky", the children are led to understand the author's likening of Smoky to a cloud because of his fluffy, gray fur as well as the position in which he is curled as he sleeps. Many of the children can probably see their own puppies curled up as a ball, and it is felt that this mental imagery adds to both the understanding and enjoyment of reading.

Smoky

Smoky is a little cloud,
A tiny puff of gray,
If you blow your breath on him,
The cloud will move away.

Then before your eyes you'll see
My puffball pet, pure gray,
My little puppy, Smoky,
Just waiting for you to play.

S.P.

A thought expressed with great pride by a very young camper who spent the night all alone in a pup tent alongside his parents' camper has been written in rhyme. It might well prompt a lively discussion about other acts of courage, as courage is sought by almost everyone. Understanding of the word vent can be discovered by the children through other words known to them: vents in the family car, ceiling vents, floor vents, etc.

Courage

My courage is growing stronger,
This feeling I can vent:
The folks slept in the camper,
And, I, outside in my tent.

S.P.

The feelings a young fisherman expressed are such that other youngsters might well relate to the incident. In the matter of the mechanics of reading, the discovery of the rhyming lines through thinking that is self-initiated or stimulated by the teacher makes it easier for children to identify words which rhyme but do not look alike -- do and blue, for example.

My First Fish

I caught my first fish today,
It was hard to decide what to do --
To take him home or to let him stay
Back in the water so blue.

The fish looked at me,
And his look was such
That I knew right away
I'd go home with no catch.

S.P.

Camping seems, at present, to be an American way of life. The following rhyme, "The Gourmet's Hot Dog", provides an opportunity to discuss the meanings of the words gourmet, concur, and caviar. The children's evaluation of the author's use of the words caviar and gourmet in a poem about the hot dog should prove interesting. Both parents and children can relate to the subject of the poem as judged by their often-heard mutual exclamation

over the hot dog cooked on a campfire.

The Gourmet's Hot Dog

A hot dog is a hot dog;
On this most would concur,
But the hot dog on my campfire
Is more like caviar.

S.P.

The versatile reader is at home with writing patterns that veer from the conventional. In this next rhyme, there are some sentences phrased as statements but intended as questions. Understanding this writing pattern is essential to the understanding of the rhyme.

The Snake

The snake is a cold-blooded animal?
His body is cold to the touch?
This guy'll take your word for it;
I know I can tell you that much!

S.P.

The fact that rhymes "come in all shapes and sizes" might be considered an advantage, as reluctant readers are often overpowered by quantity. Unfortunately, it has often been observed that quality has taken second place to quantity in the classroom. A case in point comes to mind: a little fellow, upon being given his reading assignment, heaved a heavy sigh and exclaimed sadly, "Pages! Pages! Pages!" Though the brevity of many rhymes might have an appeal to those who have an aversion to length, the concepts developed in some short rhymes, the author's clever use of words, etc. would prove challenging, indeed, to

some good readers.

The use, at first, of rhymes known to the children provides some sense of meaning, which is a "first" in reading. Therefore, it is felt that teachers should become aware of these rhymes. As the children mature and as their reading skill improves, their interests will be extended, and teachers should keep abreast of these interests which will vary from child to child and will be a help in planning individualized instruction.

It is felt, too, that rhymes provide a sense of order and harmony of sound. Their style and rhythm provide for the prose reading such as The Three Bears which many children continue to enjoy. Children can readily relate to the meaningful repetition such as "Who's been sitting in my chair?", for, as a rule, each person is concerned about his/her things first. As a child reads the question, emphasis, then, seems to fall naturally on the keywords, "WHO'S" and "MY".

Children are more apt to be interested in, and remember, reading material that has some style rather than dull, flat material such as:

See!

See John!

See John jump!

Children like to write rhymes, and their reading of material with some style helps them to appreciate good writing and to improve their own writing as well. This provides for the integration of reading and writing, now thought by many educators

to be a sound practice.

In addition to contributing to children's learning to read and write, rhymes offer some "fringe benefits" actually related to learning. Many people agree that the well-adjusted child learns better than the maladjusted.

Most teachers are aware of children in need of some behavior modification if they are to use their learning capabilities to the fullest. Varying degrees of anger have been experienced by mostly everyone, and this is healthy if it isn't to the degree that it is interfering with social, mental, emotional, and physical growth.

A collection of rhymes from a variety of sources are found in a book, by W. Coley, entitled "I'm Mad at You." The rhymes deal with varying degrees of anger, and their very titles reveal a use to which they might be put "without pointing a finger at the offender." A few titles follow:

Katherine Tattles, by Leland Jacobs
Ten Kinds, by Mary Mapes Dodge
Cry-Baby, by Martin Gardner
Magic Word, by Martin Gardner
If I Had a Firecracker, by Shel Silverstein

Finally, it is felt that Holt's warning, of which Emans reminds his readers, suggests a sensible order in teaching children to read and thus to enjoy a happier and more-productive life. The warning follows:

> ... we do things backwards. We think in terms of getting a skill first and

> then finding useful and interesting things to do with it. The sensible way, the best way, is to start with something worth doing, and then, moved by a strong desire to do it, get whatever skills are needed.

Children's deep-seated interest in rhymes seems to support Holt's reasoning and it challenges teachers to use rhymes as a part of their total reading program.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the use of rhymes of strong appeal as one part of a total comprehensive reading program would result in children's greater pleasure and proficiency in reading. Their strong motivational force and the fact that they lend themselves well to the development of reason (the sine qua non of intelligent reading) and all that it entails -- decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, interpretation, evaluation -- seem supportive of this conclusion. Additional support comes in the way of the "fringe benefits" (discussed in this paper) provided through the use of rhymes.

Implications

1. Serious consideration should be given to the use of rhymes of strong appeal to children as one part of a total comprehensive reading program, and instruction should be individualized to the greatest extent possible.
2. Capitalize on this strong motivational force of rhymes to teach both reading and writing skills.
3. Communicate with textbook publishers as to the importance of rhymes.
4. Take advantage of the valuable knowledge of school librarians as well as children's librarians in public

libraries.

5. Involve the parents in their children's reading.
6. Improvise and adapt rhymes. Children usually love what their teachers write, especially if it has personal meaning for them -- a rhyme written for a birthday, for a good deed, etc.
7. Be sure that rhymes chosen are in keeping with the child's interests and abilities. Starting with rhymes known and liked by the children provides a sense of meaning - a "first" in reading.
8. Take advantage of the "fringe benefits" of rhymes as mentioned in this paper.
9. Try to keep abreast of the recent material on the use of rhymes found in professional journals.
10. If rhymes are improvised, this order is suggested: Write the rhyme; see if the children like it; then teach the skills necessary for independent reading of the rhyme. The latter will vary from child to child.

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